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# Discrimination in hiring decisions with regard to individuals with disabilities

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DISCRIMINATION IN HIRING DECISIONS WITH REGARD TO  
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Christine Marie Flack

December 1995

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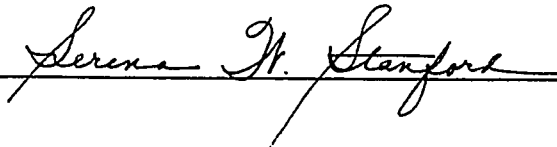


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## ABSTRACT

### DISCRIMINATION IN HIRING DECISIONS WITH REGARD TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

by Christine Marie Flack

Discrimination of individuals with disabilities in corporate America with regard to hiring and promotion practices continues to plague this underutilized yet skilled population of people. This study examined workplace discrimination as it pertains to individuals with physical and mental disabilities as well as individuals with progressive diseases. Subjects read one of eight fictitious resume cover letters depicting a job applicant with either a physical or mental disability or a progressive disease (HIV Disease), and then answered questions regarding future job success of the applicant.

Results revealed that individuals with a physical disability were more likely to be hired than were applicants with a mental disability. Also, applicants with a physical disability or those without a disability were predicted to remain longer with an organization than those individuals with HIV Disease. The implications of these findings for organizations are discussed.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
Introduction.....	3
Method.....	22
Research Participants .....	22
Instruments.....	25
Procedure.....	25
Results.....	26
Discussion.....	33
Appendices.....	42
Appendix A. Letters.....	42
Appendix B. Questionnaire.....	50
Appendix C. Demographic Items .....	52

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Frequencies and Percentiles of Demographic Variables in Wheelchair and Manic Depressive Groups.....	23
2. Frequencies and Percentiles of Demographic Variables in HIV and Control Groups.....	24
3. Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable "Likelihood of Being Hired" by Disability and Gender of Applicant.....	27
4. Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable "Applicant's Qualification Level" by Disability and Gender of Applicant.....	28
5. Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable "Applicant's Starting Salary" by Disability and Gender of Applicant.....	29
6. Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable "Applicant's Predicted Years of Service" by Disability and Gender of Applicant.....	30
7. Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable "Applicant's Productivity Level" by Disability and Gender of Applicant.....	31

Discrimination In Hiring Decisions With Regard to  
Individuals With Disabilities

Christine M. Flack

San Jose State University

Running head: DISCRIMINATION IN HIRING

### Abstract

Discrimination of individuals with disabilities in corporate America with regard to hiring and promotion practices continues to plague this underutilized yet skilled population of people. This study examined workplace discrimination as it pertains to individuals with physical and mental disabilities as well as individuals with progressive diseases. Subjects read one of eight fictitious resume cover letters depicting a job applicant with either a physical or mental disability or a progressive disease (HIV Disease), and then answered questions regarding future job success of the applicant. Results revealed that individuals with a physical disability were more likely to be hired than were applicants with a mental disability. Also, applicants with a physical disability or those without a disability were predicted to remain longer with an organization than those individuals with HIV Disease. The implications of these findings for organizations are discussed.

There are approximately 43 million disabled individuals living in the United States today (Jaben, 1992). About half or 21 million of these people are healthy enough to work in society despite their disability. However, fewer than 6 million of them are able to retain employment (Barlow, 1991). This leaves an overwhelming 15 million angry, frustrated, unemployed disabled individuals in the United States today, and the figure continues to grow (Barlow, 1991). The purpose of this study is to determine whether discrimination exists based on type of disability and gender of individual.

According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, a disability is defined as a temporary or permanent limitation on the ability of an individual to care for him or herself, perform manual tasks, walk, see, hear, speak, breathe, learn, or work. Disabilities fall under two categories: physical and mental. The physically disabled include those individuals who have spinal cord injuries, muscle or nerve disorders such as muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy, those who are blind, individuals who are hearing impaired, and those afflicted with a progressive disease such as cancer or AIDS. The complete list of mental or emotional disorders covered under the ADA, although too numerous to mention, includes such disorders as manic depressive, obsessive compulsive and schizophrenia. Human conditions not covered under the ADA (1990) include homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestitism, transsexualism, pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, gender identity disorders not resulting from physical impairments, compulsive gambling, kleptomania, pyromania, psychoactive substance use disorders resulting from current illegal use of drugs.

Unfortunately, the plight of the disabled derives less sympathy from many Americans today than it may have in the past due to the large majority of able-bodied individuals who are facing the sad and frustrating dilemma of unemployment. Due to this situation, disabled men and women of America may have an even more difficult time finding work simply because they are disabled. Findings indicate that not only are disabled Americans discriminated against by private entities (corporations), but also with regard to public accommodations (those outside the area of employment) (Barlow, 1991). In many cases, the discrimination that disabled people are subject to is more debilitating than the disability itself.

It is a sad fact that many times if two applicants apply for the same position with identical qualifications, the only difference being that one applicant is in a wheelchair and one is not, it is most likely that the able-bodied individual will get the job (Satcher, 1992). One reason for this outcome may be that an employer who has had little or no previous experience hiring or working with an individual with a disability may not be highly motivated to hire someone who is disabled (Satcher, 1992).

Another reason for not hiring an individual with a disability may be that the employer's judgment may be flawed because of myths and stereotypes that exist concerning the disabled. For example, many companies refuse to hire disabled applicants because they believe them to be lazy, poor performers, and less intelligent (Buhler, 1991). Also, many employers believe that hiring someone who is disabled will result in: (a) higher insurance costs, (b) special arrangements made at the work place to accommodate the disabled

worker which may be extensive and possibly expensive, (c) jeopardizing safety records, and (d) disabled workers not being accepted by non-disabled workers (Wilgosh & Scaret, 1987).

However, these myths are largely untrue. Because it is so difficult for disabled individuals to find work, they "tend to stay in a job substantially longer than the average employee. Moreover, they are conscientious, reliable, and dependable workers who have extremely low rates of job turnover" (Buhler, 1991, p. 17). Many times it is automatically assumed that because someone is bound to a wheelchair or afflicted with a mental illness they are unintelligent. In fact, disabled individuals are often strong in intellect and are many times considered overachievers because they often overcompensate for their disability in other areas (Buhler, 1991).

However, most employers are unaware of these facts. This presents an interesting dilemma for the disabled because they have no idea what prejudices or biases someone may have regarding the disabled population. Therefore, the question of whether or not to reveal the disability before meeting the potential employer becomes an issue. If an employer reads an applicant's resume cover letter and discovers that the applicant is in some respect disabled, the fear is that the applicant will automatically be disqualified from the job. However, if the disability is not mentioned prior to meeting the employer, upon interviewing the individual, the disability may be revealed depending on the nature of the disease. In the case of disabilities that are not apparent to the naked eye, it will be up to the applicant to



mention the disability. For many disabled individuals who are seeking gainful employment, this can be a no-win situation.

For the disabled population in the United States today, the prospects for obtaining employment can be slim. However, with the passage of the ADA, it is more difficult for organizations to avoid hiring individuals with disabilities. The ADA requires employers to make "reasonable accommodations" for employees with disabilities as long as these accommodations do not place an "undue hardship" on the organization. Such accommodations include making existing facilities accessible and usable to the disabled employee, restructuring or modifying the job or work schedule of an employee, or acquiring or modifying equipment that the disabled employee will be using (Mishkin & Schuster, 1991). According to the ADA (1990) an undue hardship is defined as an action which requires significant difficulty or expense in relation to the size of the employer and the resources available. Because of this Act, many employers have made an effort to hire qualified disabled job applicants. However, the number of unemployed qualified disabled individuals in the U.S. continues to grow.

#### Discrimination and the Physically Disabled

Many times when people think of someone who is disabled they tend to think of someone with a physical disability or more specifically, someone who is in a wheelchair. For employers, it is often easier to accommodate someone with a physical disability rather than a mental disability or a progressive disease because the disability is apparent and there is less

ambiguity regarding the severity of the disability and how it can be accommodated.

A study by Ravaud, Madiot, and Ville (1992) examined employers' decision-making processes in hiring or rejecting disabled job applicants by varying the level of qualifications and the presence or absence of a disability. The first independent variable used was the mention of a disability. The second independent variable used was the applicant's qualifications. The researchers hypothesized that disabled applicants would be at a disadvantage compared to able-bodied applicants in the area of employment regardless of level of qualification.

Mock resumes were sent out to 2,228 companies of various sizes which depicted the applicant as being disabled (confined to a wheelchair) or as being non-disabled. The applicant's level of qualifications for the position also varied in terms of being highly qualified or modestly qualified.

Discrimination was measured by the numbers of answered and unanswered job applications.

Results of the study showed that for each of the qualification levels (highly qualified and modestly qualified) disabled persons were discriminated against when seeking employment, with the results showing the most discriminatory behavior towards the modestly qualified disabled applicants. This suggests that a disabled person had significantly less of a chance than an able-bodied person of passing the first stage of being hired-obtaining an interview, irrespective of the size of the company approached and especially when the disabled applicant's qualifications barely met the hiring criteria

(Ravaud et al., 1992). This confirms the researchers' hypothesis that overall disabled individuals are at a disadvantage compared to able-bodied individuals where employment is concerned.

Bordieri and Drehmer (1986) conducted a study which examined discrimination in hiring practices of disabled job applicants based on type and cause of disability. The first independent variable was type of disability (paraplegia or drug dependency) and the second independent variable was cause of disability which varied for each disability. For the paraplegic applicant the conditions were: 1) combat-related injury while in the military; 2) injury resulting from a motorcycle accident while on military leave; 3) no cause of injury was mentioned. For drug dependent applicant the conditions were: 1) an addiction to prescribed medication while in a military hospital; 2) overindulgence and abuse while on military leave; 3) no cause of injury was mentioned. This study was based on Heider's theory of attribution which examines individual behavior based on internal or external factors. The researchers explored whether employers would make different decisions to hire an individual if the individual was portrayed as being personally responsible for his/her disability (internal attribution) or whether the applicant's disability was caused by situational factors outside the applicant's control (external attribution).

Results showed that the paraplegic applicant was evaluated more favorably (more productive, longer tenure, more likely to be hired) than the applicant with drug related problems. The researchers attributed this to the fact that disabilities that are more self evident tend to be more preferentially

treated than applicants with hidden disabilities such as drug abuse. Findings also revealed that regardless of type of disability, the applicants whose disability was attributed to an external cause were recommended more often to be hired and were perceived as having greater productivity potential and greater longevity with the company than the applicant whose disability was attributed to an internal cause (Bordieri & Drehmer, 1986). In other words, there was a significant interaction between type and cause of disability meaning that the applicant with a drug-related dependency condition was perceived as more likely to be personally responsible for their condition (internal cause) than the applicant with paraplegia (external cause).

The literature in this section suggests that disabled job applicants face an even greater challenge than do able-bodied job applicants in the area of employment. More specifically, based on the studies reviewed, disabled applicants were at a significant disadvantage in terms of hiring decisions with physically disabled applicants faring slightly better than individuals with hidden disabilities such as drug addiction or mental impairments. The research also suggests that revealing the fact that an individual has a disability prior to an interview may put that individual at a disadvantage where hiring is concerned.

#### Discrimination and the Mentally Disabled

Individuals who are afflicted with hidden disorders such as mental/emotional/neurological illnesses can be subject to an enormous amount of discrimination even beyond what those individuals with physical disabilities face. This is often because of the general lack of accurate

information that is imparted to the public regarding mental/emotional disorders. Often employers are reluctant to hire former mental patients since this disability is perceived as uncontrollable and not well understood by non-disabled individuals (Nagi, McBroom, & Collette, 1972).

Many researchers have commented that employer attitudes toward mentally handicapped persons are largely negative, especially research concerned with discrimination towards the mentally disabled. These workers have been depicted as dependent, slow, and passive, and uniformly so regardless of type and degree of mental handicap (President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, 1969, p. 12). Furthermore, because many mental and emotional disorders are "hidden" or not readily apparent to the naked eye and because it is illegal for employers to ask an applicant about any physical or mental impairments they might have, often these disorders go unmentioned for fear of discrimination in hiring or promotion decisions.

Smith (1981) conducted a mail survey of urban and rural potential employers on practices and concerns related to employing mentally disabled individuals. Results indicated that a majority of respondents expressed willingness to employ mentally disabled workers and reported having positions suitable for a mentally disabled worker. However, over three quarters of the organizations did not employ disabled employees at the time, or did not have a policy relative to hiring disabled workers. These results suggest there is a discrepancy between what employers say about hiring disabled employees and their actions.

Another study concerned with the willingness to hire or accept a placement of an individual with a mental disability was conducted by Wilgosh and Mueller (1989). Questionnaires regarding employment and work-related attitudes toward individuals with mental disabilities was mailed to 60 employers who had previously accepted a work placement of an individual or individuals with a mental disability and 100 employers who had declined acceptance of such a placement. Results revealed that attitudes were more positive for the employers who had previously received a placement of an individual(s) with a mental disability in terms of future hiring, job success, benefits, and accommodations. The employers who had not previously received a placement of an individual(s) with a mental disability appeared to view these individuals as having many problems which could irritate co-workers or warrant their being employed in separate work communities and they were also seen as troublesome in terms of being expensive to the company.

Individuals with mental impairments often have an unfair stigma attached to them about being unstable or dangerous. However, this is largely untrue. The literature suggests that often the misconceptions attributed to the mentally disabled are due to a lack of knowledge about mental illness in general (Nagi et al., 1972). However, it has been shown in the previous study mentioned that prior experience with hiring or working with someone who has a mental disability tends to generate a more positive impression and outlook on this population of individuals (Wilgosh & Mueller, 1989).

Discrimination and HIV Disease

In order to present a clear and accurate picture of what research exists in the area of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Disease and organizational discrimination, it is important that the disease itself be explained in some detail.

There are four stages of HIV Disease through which individuals progress at varying rates. The first stage is called Acute or Primary HIV Disease which develops in a matter of days or a few weeks after initial contact with HIV. This stage resembles flu-like symptoms and is rarely recognized as HIV Disease at this period. The second stage of HIV Disease is called Chronic Asymptomatic HIV Disease. At this stage individuals can be diagnosed as HIV positive which means that the HIV virus is reproducing and infecting the immune system. The third stage of HIV Disease is called Chronic Symptomatic HIV Disease or sometimes known as AIDS-related complex (ARC). Such symptoms at this stage include fever, loss of appetite and fatigue. The fourth and final stage of the HIV Disease is called Advanced HIV Disease or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). This stage is characterized by absolute failure of the immune system. Opportunistic infections such as pneumonia, cancers, neurologic diseases such as dementia, and wasting as in severe weight loss occur at this stage.

Despite the fact that HIV Disease is one of the fastest growing illnesses in the world today (according to the World Health Organization (WHO), thirteen million people are currently infected with HIV throughout the world and 120 million people will be carrying the virus by the year 2000

(Banta, 1993, p. 8), studies conducted in the area of HIV positive individuals with reference to hiring and promotion decisions are non-existent. However, in general, quite a bit of information about the disease itself has been made available to the general public and has greatly aided companies in developing policies regarding employees infected with HIV Disease. For this reason, this section will be devoted to describing companies who have taken a progressive stance in the area of HIV Disease in terms of policy formulation and employee education. "The federal Centers for Disease Control estimate that 1 in every 250 Americans has been infected by the HIV virus and most are between the ages of 25 to 44 which is the core age group of the U.S. work force" (Stodghill, Mitchell, Thurston, & Del Valle, 1993, p. 48). These figures alone have been the impetus for companies to create workable solutions for their employees with HIV Disease.

Levi Strauss & Co. (Feldman, 1991) began developing an AIDS awareness program for its employees in 1982. Levi Strauss & Co. refers to its program as an AIDS Program rather than an HIV program; however no explanation is given by the company regarding the program's name. Levi Strauss & Co. does not have a formal AIDS policy but rather regards HIV/AIDS like any other life-threatening illness that cannot be transmitted in the normal course of work. The company provides medical benefits and medical coverage, assures confidentiality when employees seek counseling or medical referral, and gives employees the right to continue working as long as they are able. Flexible schedules or part-time jobs are offered as well. Levi Strauss has also provided an extensive amount of information on the AIDS



virus and has developed training manuals on the subject as well as developed support groups for employees with HIV Disease.

Another company that has made great strides in the area of HIV programs is Digital Equipment Corporation (Feldman, 1991). Digital's education program covers the medical and legal aspects of AIDS as well as the psychosocial issues associated with the disease. Digital, like Levi Strauss, has also developed and distributed pamphlets to its employees containing medical facts about HIV Disease. Digital also assures employees complete confidentiality of medical records and gives employees with a serious illness such as HIV Disease the right to continue working as long as they can perform the duties of their job.

However, not all organizations are as well prepared or as accepting when it comes to HIV Disease. For example, a lawsuit was brought against the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company (N.E.T. & T.) by a former employee diagnosed with AIDS-Related Complex (ARC) (Cronan v. New England Telephone Co., 1986). The former employee claimed that once he disclosed his illness to his supervisor he was sent to a company doctor who ordered the former employee to a psychiatrist for AIDS anxiety. While on leave to the psychiatrist, his supervisor disclosed his illness to his co-workers breaking the rule of confidentiality. When the employee returned to work, he was harassed and physically threatened by his co-workers becoming unable to perform his job because of a lack of cooperation with his co-workers.

The former employee filed a lawsuit with the state citing discrimination on the basis of disability. N.E.T. & T. claimed the former employee's condition was not a disability because it did not substantially limit one or more major life activities and that the former employee's need to see a psychiatrist would cause an undue hardship for the organization in terms of time and medical benefits. However, the court ruled in favor of the former employee on the grounds that AIDS (HIV Disease) was in fact a disability because of the possible future complications the disease could have on the individual. The court also found there was no substantial evidence to indicate that the former employee's request to see a psychiatrist would cause an undue hardship on the organization.

The literature reviewed indicates that some companies are making a serious effort to inform their employees about HIV Disease as well as to develop policies to accommodate those infected with the virus. Unfortunately as the number of individuals infected continues to increase daily, the number of companies without policies or information for their employees on HIV Disease is still extremely high. Hopefully, with the attention that companies such as Levi Strauss & Co. and Digital Equipment Corporation have received regarding their approach to HIV Disease this will be an incentive to other companies to develop and implement policies regarding this disease.

#### Discrimination, Disability and Gender

Although studies examining the effects of gender of disabled job applicants in hiring decisions are few in number, researchers have suggested

that disabled women face a greater amount of discrimination than disabled men with regard to employment. Statistics on disabled women indicate that between 65 to 76 percent of all disabled women are unemployed (Fine & Asch, 1985). It is also believed that while 94 percent of disabled men who are rehabilitated receive training in wage-earning occupations, only 68 percent of the disabled women receive such training (Fine & Asch, 1985). Researchers have also found that disabled women earn substantially less money than disabled men (for vocationally rehabilitated men vs. women the mean annual incomes are \$4188 vs. \$2744, respectively (Fine & Asch, 1985). Also, it is believed that women are less likely to find a job after having a disability. Those who do find a job are more likely to absorb a cut in pay and are even more likely to live in families with incomes at or below the poverty level (Fine & Asch, 1985). Moreover, disabled women have disproportionately lower levels of disability coverage and insurance benefits (Fine & Asch, 1985). All of these facts, although somewhat dated, do paint a rather discouraging picture of the plight of the disabled woman job applicant.

Women, however, are no strangers to discrimination. Able-bodied women have for years had to fight to receive equal pay and equal benefits for being employed in the same occupation as a male. Many times the discrimination occurs because of the stereotypical views held by many regarding occupations suited only for males or only for females. For example, "because women are commonly thought to be warm, sensitive, emotional, dependent, nurturant, passive, and indecisive" (Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988, p. 179), a women is more likely to be hired as, for example, a nurse (for which

nurturance is an appropriate trait) and less likely to be hired for jobs such as sales manager, which are thought to require masculine traits (e.g., aggressiveness and decisiveness)" (Glick et al., 1988).

Researchers have also asserted that the level of job demands or task difficulty within an occupation may contribute to biased ratings of male and female job applicants such as in the case of a managerial position where male applicants tend to be rated higher than female job applicants (Plake, Murphy-Berman, Derscheid, Gerber, Miller, Speth, & Tomes, 1987). Finally, bias toward females may be the result of ambiguity of fit between an applicant's qualifications and the job requirements present in the application material (Plake et al., 1987).

A study by Gerdes and Garber (1983) investigated the bias toward eight hypothetical job candidates. Application materials of candidates varied in terms of: 1) gender; 2) whether their academic performance indicated high or moderate competence; 3) whether they were applying for a male gender-related job that entailed only technical engineering tasks or both managerial and technical skills. It was hypothesized that, in situations of ambiguous fit, raters resort to negative stereotypes about women in making job-related decisions.

The raters were 64 second- and third-year managers attending or located near a manager training center who were asked to assume the role of a manager in an engineering/consulting firm. All of the hypothetical applicants were qualified for the technical level position but did not have managerial experience. In evaluating the suitability of an applicant for a

particular job opening, raters showed no preference for either males or females for the technical job, but preferred male applicants when the job required both technical and managerial skills. Specifically, discrimination against women occurred when the ability to meet the demands of the job were not clearly evident in the female's credentials. The researchers attributed this pattern of bias favoring males to the ambiguity of fit between the applicant's credentials and the job requirements. This supports the theory by Kielser (1975) that discrimination against women in ambiguous-fit situations rests on the overall stereotype that women are less competent than men.

The literature reviewed indicates that disabled women face an even greater challenge in finding employment than do men with disabilities. Findings show that women are not only more likely to be discriminated against in terms of being hired for a position but may also receive a lower rate of pay than a disabled male job applicant. Studies also indicate that ambiguity of fit between a disabled female job applicant's qualifications and a position in question is likely to result in the hiring of a disabled male over a disabled female simply because of the traditional stereotypes operating in our society of men being more competent than women in the workplace.

### Summary

The literature discussed thus far suggests that individuals with disabilities in general face a greater amount of discrimination in employment than do those individuals without disabilities. Also, the literature concerned

with applicant gender as well as the presence or absence of a disability indicates a bias in favor of males over females.

Unfortunately, studies in the area of individuals with mental disabilities and employment decisions are few in number. Likewise, studies in the area of individuals with progressive diseases, specifically HIV Disease, are practically non-existent. This situation leaves many unanswered questions and leaves room for much speculation as to how both populations of individuals can be accommodated in the workplace.

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which biases and stereotypes play a role in making selection and hiring decisions regarding qualified disabled job applicants. Previous research conducted in the area of discrimination and the disabled has been limited in reference to the areas of gender and progressive diseases as possible barriers to employment. In examining the effect that gender of applicant and type of disability has on the decision-making processes of an employer (while keeping education and qualifications equal) one may be able to determine the extent to which preconceived notions regarding the disabled govern an employer's ability to predict future job success of a disabled job candidate. It is predicted that getting hired will vary according to both the gender of the individual and his or her type of disability.

#### Hypotheses

There are four hypotheses in this study. Hypothesis one focuses on the issue of gender and disabled job applicants. Hypothesis two focuses on individuals with progressive diseases versus those with

physical or mental disabilities with regard to aspects of employment.

Hypothesis three focuses on individuals with physical disabilities and aspects of employment. Hypothesis four focuses on gender and individuals with physical and mental disabilities and those with progressive diseases with regard to aspects of employment.

Hypothesis 1: The literature regarding women and occupations, reveals that often sex discrimination in hiring exists because of the traditional stereotypes and biases held about women that continue to operate in our society, especially in the case of women applying for jobs that are deemed to be traditionally male.

**Hypothesis 1:** Disabled female job applicants will be rated lower overall on aspects of employment (likelihood of being hired, qualification level, starting salary, length of time with company, productivity level) than will disabled male job applicants.

Hypothesis 2: With regard to individuals with progressive diseases such as HIV Disease, many companies have developed and continue to improve upon policies concerning employment and integration of these individuals in the workplace. However, many employers continue to let inaccurate information about such diseases cloud their judgment when making hiring and promotion decisions.

**Hypothesis 2:** Individuals with progressive diseases will be rated lower overall on aspects of employment (likelihood of being hired, qualification level, starting salary, length of time with company, productivity level) than will individuals with a physical or mental disability.

Hypothesis 3: The stereotypical picture of an individual with a disability is often one of a physical nature. This notion is often times reinforced by the physical accommodations (e.g. wheelchair ramps, enlarged doorways, additional elevators) that companies have made and continue to make in accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. Because of this, it may seem as though the physically disabled are more desirable (than mentally disabled applicants or those with a progressive disease) in terms of employability. This is often due to the obviousness of the disability which allows employers to make a quick assessment of possible accommodations for the individual.

**Hypothesis 3:** Individuals with a physical disability will be rated higher overall on aspects of employment (likelihood of being hired, qualification level, starting salary, length of time with company, productivity level) than an individual with a mental disability.

Hypothesis 4: The issues of gender and type of disability often times dictates an applicant's level of employability regardless of applicant qualification level. This is often due to the preconceived notions and lack of education an employer may have regarding a specific gender and/or disability that an applicant possesses.

**Hypothesis 4:** Males with either a physical or mental disability will be rated higher than females with either a physical or mental disability on aspects of employment (likelihood of being hired, qualification level, starting salary, length of time with company, productivity level); males and females with HIV Disease will be rated similarly on aspects of employment.



## Method

### Participants

Participants were 156 undergraduate students (66 males and 90 females) between 18 and 50 years of age enrolled in Psychology classes at San Jose State University. The individuals who participated in this study were part of a human subject pool of students which is organized by the Psychology Department at San Jose State University. Students received extra credit points for the psychology course they were enrolled in for participation in this study. Demographic information was collected on the subjects concerning: year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior); whether or not they have been in a work situation regarding hiring an individual with a disability; their number of years of full-time and part-time employment; whether or not they have been in a situation where an accommodation was made for them; whether or not they know someone with a physical or mental disability or HIV Disease; if they can recall a time when they felt discriminated against; and whether or not they are familiar with the Americans With Disabilities Act (See Table 1 and Table 2 ).

The typical student participating in this study was female in their freshman year of college. Overall they indicated that they had little full time work experience (31% had none) and because of this, the majority of the students indicated they had not been in a situation in which they faced the decision of hiring someone with a disability. Although most respondents indicated that they had not had an accommodation made for them, many of them knew someone with a disability. The majority of the students did not

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentiles of Demographic Variables in Wheelchair and Manic Depressive Groups

Demographic Variable	Wheelchair (N=35)		Manic/Depress (N=42)	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	13	20.3	17	26.6
Female	22	24.4	25	27.8
Year in school				
Freshman	17	49.0	17	40.5
Sophomore	02	5.7	05	11.9
Junior	09	25.7	08	19.0
Senior	06	17.1	10	23.8
Graduate	01	2.9	02	4.8
Made Similar Hiring Decisions?				
Yes	04	11.4	03	7.1
No	31	88.6	39	92.9
Had accommodations made for you?				
Yes	12	34.3	16	38.1
No	23	65.7	24	57.1
Know someone with a disability?				
Yes	17	48.6	20	47.6
No	18	51.4	22	52.4
Ever felt discriminated against?				
Yes	13	37.1	16	38.1
No	22	62.9	26	61.9
Familiar with ADA?				
Yes	14	40.0	13	31.0
No	21	60.0	29	69.0

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentiles of Demographic Variables in HIV Disease and Control Groups

Demographic Variable	HIV (N=45)		Control (N=32)	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	18	28.1	16	25.0
Female	27	30.0	16	17.8
Year in school				
Freshman	18	40.0	18	56.3
Sophomore	07	15.6	02	6.3
Junior	08	17.8	06	18.8
Senior	11	24.4	05	15.6
Graduate	01	22.0	01	3.1
Made Similar Hiring Decisions?				
Yes	03	6.7	04	12.5
No	42	93.3	28	87.5
Had accommodations made for you?				
Yes	17	37.8	09	28.1
No	28	62.2	23	71.9
Know someone with a disability?				
Yes	21	46.7	16	50.0
No	24	53.3	16	50.0
Ever felt discriminated against?				
Yes	19	42.2	11	34.4
No	26	57.8	21	65.6
Familiar with ADA?				
Yes	13	28.9	08	25.0
No	32	71.1	24	75.0

feel that they had been discriminated against and over half indicated that they were not familiar with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

### Instruments

The first independent variable used in this study was type of disability which varied on four levels: 1) physical disability (wheelchair user); 2) mental disability (Manic Depressive Personality Disorder); 3) progressive disease (HIV Disease); 4) a control group in which there was no mention of a disability.

The second independent variable used was gender of applicant. The dependent variables in this study are: 1) the likelihood the applicant would be hired for the job; 2) perceived qualification level of applicant; 3) starting salary of applicant; 4) expected tenure of applicant; and 5) applicant's expected level of productivity. Each variable was rated on a 5-point Likert Scale with 1 indicating a positive attitude toward the job applicant and 5 indicating a negative attitude toward the job applicant.

### Procedure

Participants were instructed that this study was being conducted to determine employment potential of disabled individuals. Subjects were given one of eight variations of a fictitious resume cover letter: a male or female applicant with a physical disability (confined to a wheelchair), a male or female applicant with a mental disability (Manic Depressive Disorder), a male or female applicant with a progressive disease (HIV Disease) or a male or female applicant with no mention of a disability (control group) (See Appendix A). Subjects read the letter and answered a questionnaire designed to assess discrimination in employment and future job success of the disabled

(see Appendix B). After completing the questionnaire, subjects answered several questions regarding demographic information. (See Appendix C). Subjects were given approximately 20 minutes to read the letter and complete the questionnaire and demographic questions.

### Results

Table 3 through Table 7 show the means, standard deviations and marginal means for the two independent variables of Gender of Applicant and Type of Disability for each of the five dependent variables.

Overall, the means indicate that the responses generated by the subjects did not differ over the four experimental conditions. That is, male and female subjects overall were similar in the way they responded in this study. Furthermore, the gender of the applicant described in the cover letters did not have a significant effect upon subjects responses across experimental conditions. However, the means indicate that applicants who are wheelchair users are more likely to be hired within an organization than are applicants with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder. Also, applicants who are wheelchair users or have no disability are predicted to remain longer with an organization than are those individuals with HIV Disease. In addition, it was found that females were consistently rated higher on all aspects of employment (likelihood of being hired, qualification level, starting salary, length of time with company, productivity level) than were males in the Wheelchair User condition. Also, females were consistently rated higher on all aspects of employment except on "Starting salary of applicant" than were males in the HIV Disease condition.

Table 3  
Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable  
"Likelihood of Being Hired" by Disability and Gender of Applicant

Disability	Likelihood of Being Hired				Totals
	W	M	H	C	
Male	3.80 (.77) n=20	3.32 (.57) n=22	3.58 (.75) n=21	3.36 (.74) n=14	3.52 (.72) n=77
Female	4.07 (1.10) n=15	3.26 (.87) n=19	3.42 (.83) n=24	3.78 (.55) n=18	3.59 (.88) n=76
Totals	*3.91 (.92) n=35	*3.29 (.72) n=41	3.49 (.79) n=45	3.59 (.67) n=32	3.55 (.80) N=153

Note. W = Wheelchair User; M = Manic Depressive; H = HIV Positive;  
 C = Control

\* The mean for Group W is significantly greater than the mean for Group M,  
 $p < .05$ .

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable  
"Applicant's Qualification Level" by Disability and Gender of Applicant

Disability	Applicant's Qualification Level				Totals
	W	M	H	C	
Male	4.05 (.60) n=20	3.95 (.74) n=21	4.25 (.44) n=20	3.78 (.80) n=14	4.03 (.66) n=75
Female	4.27 (.96) n=15	4.00 (.58) n=19	3.79 (.59) n=24	3.83 (.51) n=18	3.95 (.67) n=76
Totals	4.14 (.77) n=35	3.98 (.66) n=40	4.00 (.57) n=44	3.81 (.64) n=32	3.99 (.66) N=153

Note. W = Wheelchair User; M = Manic Depressive; H = HIV Positive;  
 C = Control.

Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable  
"Applicant's Starting Salary" by Disability and Gender of Applicant

Disability	Applicant's Starting Salary				Totals
	W	M	H	C	
Male	3.10 (.55) n=20	3.00 (.00) n=22	3.19 (.40) n=21	3.07 (.27) n=14	3.09 (.37) n=77
Female	3.07 (.46) n=15	3.05 (.39) n=20	3.17 (.48) n=24	3.28 (.57) n=18	3.14 (.48) n=77
Totals	3.09 (.51) n=35	3.02 (.27) n=42	3.18 (.44) n=45	3.19 (.47) n=32	3.12 (.43) N=154

Note. W = Wheelchair User; M = Manic Depressive; H = HIV Positive;  
 C = Control.



Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable  
"Applicant's Predicted Years of Service" by Disability and Gender of Applicant

Disability	Applicant's Predicted Years of Service				Totals
	W	M	H	C	
Male	3.42 (.61) n=19	3.04 (.58) n=22	2.60 (.68) n=20	3.36 (.63) n=14	3.08 (.69) n=75
Female	3.33 (.72) n=15	3.00 (.65) n=20	2.96 (.82) n=23	3.39 (.61) n=18	3.14 (.72) n=76
Totals	*3.38 (.65) n=34	3.02 (.60) n=42	*2.79 (.77) n=43	*3.38 (.61) n=32	3.11 (.71) N=151

Note. W = Wheelchair User; M = Manic Depressive; H = HIV Positive;  
 C=Control.

\* The means for Groups W and C are significantly greater than the mean for Group H,  $p < .05$ .

Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations For Aspects of Employment Variable  
"Applicant's Productivity Level" by Disability and Gender of Applicant

Disability	Applicant's Productivity Level				Totals
	W	M	H	C	
Male	4.06 (.42) n=18	3.82 (.39) n=22	3.81 (.68) n=21	3.71 (.61) n=14	3.85 (.54) n=75
Female	4.07 (.46) n=15	3.85 (.49) n=20	3.83 (.56) n=24	3.89 (.47) n=18	3.90 (.50) n=77
Totals	4.06 (.43) n=33	3.83 (.44) n=42	3.82 (.61) n=45	3.81 (.54) n=32	3.88 (.52) N=152

Note. W = Wheelchair User; M = Manic Depressive; H = HIV Positive;  
 C = Control.

Although the main hypothesis addressed the variables of gender of applicant and type of disability there was concern regarding any possible gender of subject a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to examine differences between three independent variables (Gender of Subject x Gender of Applicant x Type of Disability). Results revealed that the 3-way interaction was not significant [ $F(15,387) = .51$ , n.s.]; the Gender of Subject x Gender of Applicant [ $F(5,139) = 1.85$ , n.s.] and the Gender of Subject x Type of Disability [ $F(15,411) = 1.42$ , n.s.] two way interactions were also non-significant. It was therefore determined at this time that the variable of Gender of Subject did not significantly interact with the variables of Gender of Applicant and Type of Disability. This variable was therefore ignored in further analyses.

In order to test the four hypotheses, several two-way MANOVA and univariate Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted. A MANOVA the variables Gender of Applicant and Type of Disability yielded non-significant results [ $F(15, 411) = 1.21$ , n.s.].

The univariate Analysis of Variance interaction was nonsignificant as well; however, the dependent variable "applicant's qualification level" did approach significance [ $F(3,139) = 2.19$ ,  $p=.09$ ]. Several main effects were also tested using Multivariate and univariate Analyses. The main effect of Gender of Applicant was tested using a MANOVA and results were nonsignificant [ $F(5,135) = .51$ , n.s.]. Results were nonsignificant at the univariate level as well. However, the main effect of Type of Disability did reveal significant effects [ $F(15, 411) = 3.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ]. Results at the univariate

level were also significant for the variables "likelihood of applicant being hired" [ $F(3,139) = 3.73, p < .05$ ] and "applicant's predicted years of service with an organization" [ $F(3,139) = 7.27, p < .01$ ].

To further examine differences between groups a Tukey analysis was performed using the variables of "likelihood of applicant being hired" and "applicant's predicted years of service with organization". Concerning the dependent variable "likelihood that an applicant would be hired for a position," it was found that applicants who are wheelchair users ( $M = 3.91, p < .05$ ) are significantly more likely to be hired than are those applicants with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder ( $M = 3.29, p < .05$ ). Considering the variable "applicant's predicted years of service with an organization" applicants who are either wheelchair users ( $M = 3.38, p < .05$ ) or do not have a disability ( $M = 3.38, p < .05$ ) are predicted to remain with an organization significantly longer than individuals with HIV Disease ( $M = 2.80, p < .05$ ).

### Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the second hypothesis (Individuals with progressive diseases will be rated lower overall on aspects of employment than will individuals with a physical or mental disability) and third hypothesis (Individuals with a physical disability will be rated higher overall on aspects of employment than will individuals with a mental disability) were partially supported. That is, applicants who were wheelchair users were predicted to be more likely to be hired within an organization than applicants with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder. Also, applicants who were either wheelchair users or did not have a disability were predicted to

remain longer with an organization than those individuals with HIV Disease.

This significant outcome of wheelchair users being more likely to be hired into an organization than individuals with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder can be interpreted several ways. It may be that individuals with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder are victims of the so called stigma attached to having hidden disabilities or those disabilities that may not be apparent to the naked eye. Individuals who are in a wheelchair have a disability that in many cases makes the accommodations for these individuals relatively obvious. However, individuals afflicted with hidden disabilities, especially those that are organic or emotional in nature are not only faced with the decision of whether or not to disclose the disability to the organization for fear of backlash but are also faced with dealing with the stigma attached to someone with a mental disability. Although only a small percentage of individuals in the general population with mental disorders are considered dangerous, the media has portrayed them as bizarre, frightening and even dangerous. It may be because of this that many individuals are reluctant to disclose the fact that they have a mental or emotional disability. Another explanation is that the general public lacks in-depth knowledge and understanding concerning mental illness which contributes to the so-called enigmatic nature of mental or emotional disorders.

The results of hypothesis 2, indicating that individuals who are wheelchair users or who do not have a disability are seen as remaining longer with an organization than are individuals with HIV Disease may indicate

that respondents are considering the physical complications that HIV Disease may have on an infected individual which could ultimately affect work productivity depending on what stage of the illness the individual is experiencing. An alternative explanation is that although much information has been circulated throughout companies regarding HIV Disease, many people are still unaware of the way in which the HIV virus is contracted and the effects the virus can have on an individual. Because of this, many peoples' decisions may operate on inaccurate facts and the fear rather than on accurate information regarding this disease. This would therefore give individuals infected with the HIV virus an unfair disadvantage in the workplace in the area of hiring and promotion decisions.

Hypothesis 1 (Disabled female job applicants will be rated lower overall on aspects of employment than will male disabled job applicants) and Hypothesis 4 (Males with a physical or mental disability will be rated higher on aspects of employment than will females with a physical or mental disability; males and females with HIV Disease will be rated similarly on aspects of employment) were not supported. In fact, the results showed that overall neither gender of subject participating in this study nor gender of applicant mentioned in the resume cover letter significantly affected the results of this study. There are a few explanations for these results.

The fact that the responses generated by both the male and female subjects participating in this study did not differ significantly may be due to the fact that the majority of the subjects used in this study were undergraduates with relatively little full-time work experience in

corporations. Because of this, they may be unaware of the potential gender bias that may exist in the hiring processes within an organization.

Taking into consideration that the effect of gender of applicant did not differ significantly across the four experimental conditions may be due to the fact that many people are naive to the extent to which a disabled individual is able to perform in a job. Therefore, simply the fact that a disability was mentioned in the resume cover letter, may have influenced the readers' decision so much as to have not even considered the applicant's gender or at least not considered it important in making this hiring decision.

Although gender of applicant did not differ significantly across the four experimental conditions a certain pattern did emerge. Females were consistently rated higher on all aspects of employment (likelihood of being hired, qualification level, starting salary, length of time with company, productivity level) than were males in the Wheelchair User condition. Also, females were consistently rated higher on all aspects of employment except on "Starting salary of applicant" than were males in the HIV Disease condition. The reason why females were rated higher on all aspects of employment than males in the wheelchair user condition is unclear. However, the fact that females with HIV Disease were rated higher than males with HIV Disease could be the result of the fact that HIV Disease when first diagnosed, was found to be most prevalent among homosexual males. This finding along with the fact that there seems to be a greater stigma attached to be homosexual and male as opposed to being homosexual and female could explain this outcome.

This study indicates that in fact some bias does exist between different types of disabilities. Much of this could be due to a lack of education or awareness on the part of individuals to understand a population of people that in the past and in many ways in the present has been misrepresented and as a result, segregated from mainstream society. It is important that companies be made aware of just how able-bodied disabled individuals are and make a concerted effort to incorporate them into corporate America. The passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act has helped accomplish this. Prior to the ADA, many employers neither understood nor had a legal obligation to employ individuals with disabilities in their organizations. Now with the passage of this act, employers are not allowed to discriminate against someone in a work situation simply because they are disabled. However, many individuals have had little experience hiring and working with someone with a disability, so it may be necessary to conduct some type of training in order to demystify the information surrounding the disabled population.

One way to accomplish this would be to design a training program for employees in which they are given actual real life examples of individuals who are disabled and working productively within an organization. Another way would be to conduct several role play exercises in which employees trade off roles as manager and a disabled job applicant in an interview situation in order to gain a better understanding of the issues each side must face in possible hiring circumstances.



An area of future research is to give individuals all eight versions of the resume cover letter and have them rank order them according to who they would be most likely to hire to who they would be least likely to hire. This may give a clearer picture of the actual extent to which an individual would exhibit discriminatory behavior towards someone based on their gender as well as their disability. Another area of research might be to look at only one category of disability (physical, mental, progressive disease) in greater detail and focus on personality type as a function of possible discriminatory behavior. This could give insight into the extent to which personality type (Type A, Type B, Type T) plays a role in hiring an individual with a disability.

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Appendix A

April 7, 1994

XYZ Corporation  
121 North First Street  
San Jose, CA 95136

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Judith Walker and I am writing this letter in response to the position of Systems Analyst I. I am confident that once you review my credentials you will find that I am an ideal candidate for this position.

In May of 1991, I graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science with a minor in Business Administration. Since graduation, my work experience has been in the area of end-user technical support. My work experience has included the overseeing of day to day company operations, the design and implementation of an internal computer network using Novell software, and troubleshooting problems within the company's system. I am also fluent in FORTRAN, COBOL, Programming in Language C, DOS, and CAD.

I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this position further. However, I feel I should mention the fact that as a result of a automobile accident last Spring, I am a wheelchair user. However, this condition has not in the past prevented me from performing the duties of my job. Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Judith Walker

April 7, 1994

XYZ Corporation  
121 North First Street  
San Jose, CA 95136

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jonathan Walker and I am writing this letter in response to the position of Systems Analyst I. I am confident that once you review my credentials you will find that I am an ideal candidate for this position.

In May of 1991, I graduated from the University of California, Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science with a minor in Business Administration. Since graduation, my work experience has been in the area of end-user technical support. My work experience has included the overseeing of day to day company operations, the design and implementation of an internal computer network using Novell software, and troubleshooting problems within the company's system. I am also fluent in FORTRAN, COBOL, Programming in Language C, DOS, and CAD.

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Jonathan Walker

April 7, 1994

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I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this position further. However, I feel I should mention the fact that in the Spring of last year, I was diagnosed as HIV positive. This condition however, has not in the past prevented me from performing the duties of my job. Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

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April 7, 1994

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I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this position further. However, I feel I should mention the fact that in the Spring of last year I was diagnosed with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder. This disorder however, is controlled by medication and has not in the past prevented me from performing the duties of my job. Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

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I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this position further. However, I feel I should mention the fact that in the Spring of last year I was diagnosed with Manic Depressive Personality Disorder. This disorder however, is controlled by medication and has not in the past prevented me from performing the duties of my job. Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

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I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this position further. Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Walker

## Appendix B

## Questionnaire

Please read each question carefully and circle the correct response based on the information in the resume cover letter you have just read.

1) What is the likelihood you would hire this person?

Extremely Likely	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Likely	Not Likely at All

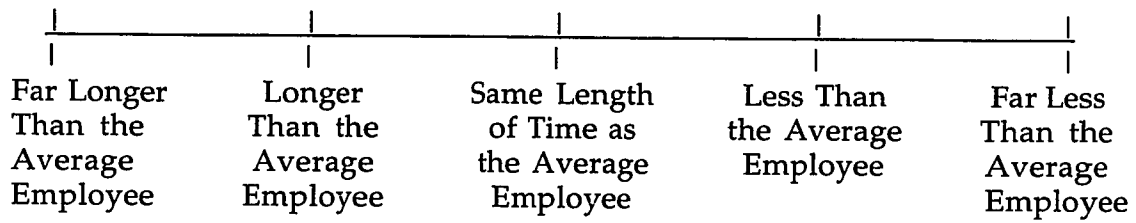
2) To what extent do you feel the applicant is qualified for the position?

Extremely Likely	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Likely	Not Likely at All

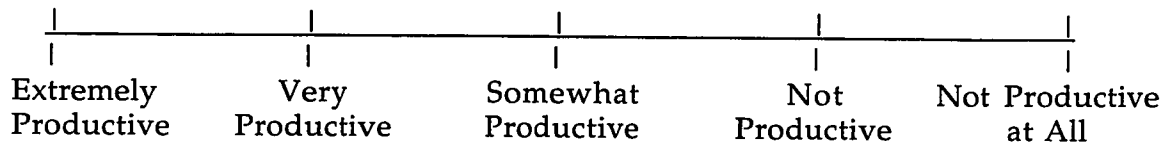
3) If the applicant were to be offered this job, what would his or her starting salary be compared to other applicants?

Far Above That of Other Applicants	Above That of Other Applicants	Same as Other Applicants	Below That of Other Applicants	Far Below That of Other Applicants

- 4) If the applicant were to start this job, how long do you think he or she would remain with the company?



- 5) If the applicant were hired, how productive would he or she be at the job?



Appendix C  
Demographics

Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Year in School \_\_\_\_\_ Freshman \_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore \_\_\_\_\_ Junior  
\_\_\_\_\_ Senior

Have you ever had to make a similar decision(s) i.e. hiring an individual with a disability in your place of work?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Number of years of full-time employment \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years of part-time employment \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been in a situation where an accommodation has been made for you?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Do you know of someone with a physical or mental disability or someone who is HIV Positive?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please state type of disability.

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Can you recall a time when you felt you were discriminated against?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please describe on the lines below.

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Are you familiar with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No